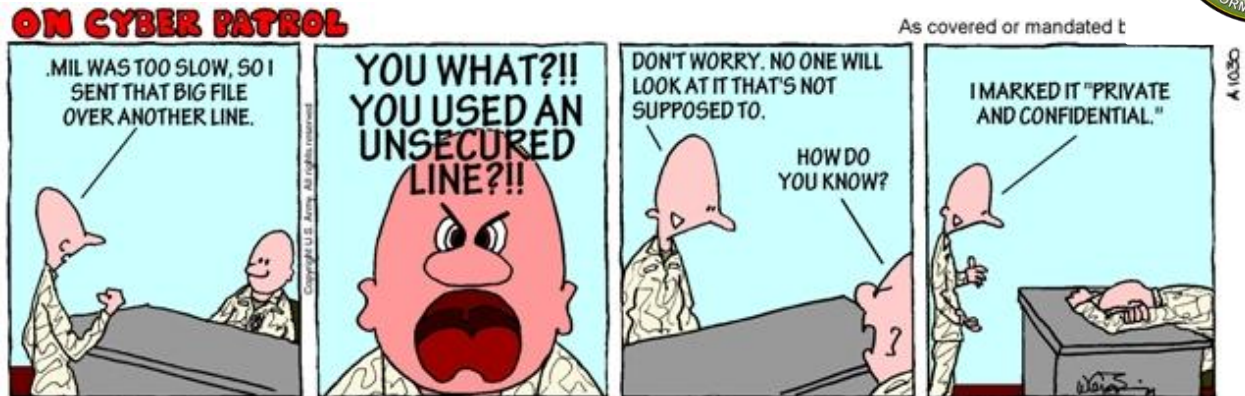


When Doing the “Right Thing” Can Be Wrong

November 2007



A recent study showed that people have two great fears at work: failure and the boss. That's no big surprise. It was that way in our parents' day. The way they handled it was to think before they acted so that mistakes were reduced and the boss was kept happy. Now these classic fears have a new critical factor – time and how little of it there seems to be.

In only a few decades our digital world has pushed our decision making process to extremes. As information flows faster, it forces us to react faster and solve problems faster. One could argue that in the military during a war that pressure is increased ten fold.

A military mind is extremely focused. Through intense training and situational drills, a soldier is expected to react as prescribed by doctrine, to assess quickly a roadblock to mission success and go over it, around it, or through it as necessary. For example, if a soldier is ordered to move data from point A to B immediately and the normal secured communication route is either down or slowed, a soldier focused on successful completion of that task may bypass established communications and security procedures.

A person under this kind of pressure could think that there are times when rules and correct procedures appear to be more of a hindrance than a help. In their minds, consequences are something to be dealt with later. The flaw in that logic is that the consequences of bypassing information assurance procedures in wartime – hot or cold – could be failed missions, compromised security and lives unnecessarily put at risk.

The human mind is quick to adapt. As technology drives our thought processes, we will eventually be able to process information and decisions faster. Until that time we need to take those critical few seconds that often spell the difference between doing it right or doing it wrong.

Information assurance (IA) is too often an afterthought. It is imperative that it be at the front of every information transmission and storage choice and action. By taking those few extra seconds – more than enough time for a computer to do all your homework from kindergarten through high school – you can keep your IA decisions on track to protect yourself and your fellow soldier.